

# Gastroenteritis

**This leaflet provides information about gastroenteritis. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.**

## What is gastroenteritis and why has my child got it?

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the gut (intestines) causing diarrhoea and/or vomiting. In the UK, a virus normally causes gastroenteritis, the most common being rotavirus in children. There are some bacteria that can cause gastroenteritis. These are usually associated with infected food (food poisoning).

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Gastroenteritis may cause:

- Diarrhoea (which usually stops within 5-7 days but can last up to two weeks) and vomiting (which can last up to three days)
- Crampy pains in the tummy
- Dehydration - passing less urine than normal with a dry mouth or lips
- Fever, headache and aching limbs can occur.

## Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

No, usually the diagnosis is based on the information you give to the doctors. In some cases, you may be asked for a stool sample from your child e.g., if they are very unwell, have bloody stools, suspected food poisoning or after recent travel abroad.

## What treatments are available?

Antibiotics, anti-diarrhoeal, anti-sickness and probiotic medications are not routinely recommended.

## Is there anything I can do to help my child?

- Encourage your child to drink lots of fluid, even if they are vomiting. Drinking small amounts of fluid more often will help stop them getting dehydrated.
- Oral rehydration solutions (a mixture of salt, water and sugar) can be bought from most pharmacies. Avoid undiluted fruit juice and fizzy drinks as they can worsen diarrhoea but a 50:50 mix of apple juice and water is generally well tolerated.
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help if your child has pain or fever causing distress.
- Allow them to eat if they are hungry but don't worry if they don't want to eat.

You should contact your GP or 111 if your child:

- Is vomiting and can't keep any fluid down
- Is showing signs of dehydration (weeing less than normal, has less tears when they are crying, is very sleepy or confused)
- Has blood in their diarrhoea
- Has a high temperature
- Has severe stomach pain that doesn't go away
- Is younger than six months old
- Has an underlying health condition
- Has caught an infection abroad.

**Call an ambulance or go to the Emergency Department (A&E) if your child:**

- **Has green or yellow-green vomit, blood in their vomit or vomit that looks like ground coffee**
- **Has cold or mottled hands and feet**
- **Is pale and floppy or drowsy**
- **Might have swallowed something poisonous**
- **Has a stiff neck and pain when looking at bright lights or a sudden severe headache.**

### **How to prevent spread and further episodes**

- Wash your hands and your child's hands with soap and water after going to the toilet or changing their nappy
- Wash hands before eating or touching food
- Children should not use swimming pools for two weeks after gastroenteritis
- Whilst your child is unwell do not share towels, flannels, cutlery or utensils
- Keep children off school for 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## **Additional services**

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

## NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

## AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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